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John Muir Newsletter, November/December 1984

Holt-Atherton Pacific Center for Western Studies

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JOHN MUIR NEWSLETTER



Holt-Atherton Pacific Center
for Western Studies

University of the Pacific
Stockton, Calif 95211

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MICROFORM PROJECT PROGRESS (?) REPORT

In our last newsletter we spoke confidently of wrapping up the project in time for the Muir Conference in April. Now we're not quite so sure. We'll be close, but technical problems and some staff changes have forced us to revise our timetable. At this writing we are projecting a July 1 publication date.

One big recent change was the reorganization of our editorial staff. For three years Kirsten E. Lewis has been employed fulltime as Assistant Editor. Beginning November 1, in order to take advantage of a permanent job opportunity, she dropped to half-time on the Muir Project. To take up some of the clerical slack we hired Mary Drew, a University of the Pacific graduate student. She is putting in twelve hours a week at the moment. We also reassigned Rosemary Bernal, a senior computer science major--who has been with the project for the past four years--to assist with indexing the documents for the Guide. Rosemary helped write the program and is working directly with the computer services staff of the University to input the data on a CRT terminal. In addition we are fortunate to have access to the Federal Work-Study program, which blessed us with several students last fall, including Janet Tate who will continue with us this spring.

The filming schedule has also been thrown off because of technical and staffing problems encountered by one of the contract microfilmmers. Muir staff members have worked closely and regularly with camera operators to meet our high filming standards. In many cases the low contrast values and deteriorated condition of original documents have made the filming extremely slow and tedious. Document problems also have contributed to the higher percentage of operator errors than anticipated, thus requiring more retakes than planned. As of this writing twenty-one reels of microfilm and 53 microfiche have been generated from Series II (journals), III (manuscripts) and IV (photos and drawings). We expect to complete the manuscript series by late January, leaving some twenty reels of correspondence still to be filmed.

The filming slowdown has in turn delayed the indexing, which is geared to the frame numbers of the filmed documents. Without the completed index it is not possible to print the hardcopy Guide, which we hoped to have available by April. All in all it's been a rather long winter for the Muir Project--not to mention a three-week bout of tule fog that's about as welcome as a letter from your friendly I.R.S. (unless a friendly refund check is enclosed, of course).

DUMB PUN DEPARTMENT

Why did John Muir never carry a compass? Because he learned from bitter experience as a young man never to trust technology and its devices. On one of his earliest expeditions he took along a shiny new Tates compass. But it was so inaccurate he nearly died from exposure before he finally found his way back to civilization. Thereafter he followed his nose and warned his friends that "he who has a Tates is lost."

MUIR CONFERENCE IN APRIL

Be sure to register early for the exciting conference which will be held April 12-13 at the University of the Pacific. Registration forms have been in the mail only a few days, but we anticipate a large attendance. Seating for all events is limited, register early to reduce the chance of missing any events. Let us know if you need extra registration forms.

We listed many speakers and topics in our last newsletter. One new highlight will be a special performance by Hollywood Actor/Writer Lee Stetson, whose one-man Muir show has pleased crowds from coast to coast.

We have heard rumors that two new Muir books may be out in time for the Conference which will bring together probably the "largest collection ever assembled" of Muir authors. If you are an autograph collector you should bring along an extra suitcase and a good ink pen.

CLIPPING FROM THE MUIR COLLECTION

(Editor's note: Muir spent the summer of 1890 exploring and sketching Glacier Bay and its icy wonders. The following account of the trip, probably clipped from the Boston Globe, was found among the unidentified newspaper scraps in the Muir Collection at the University of the Pacific.)

FROM THE WONDERFUL GLACIER

Prof. John Muir Homeward Bound From His Trip to Alaska

The Eminent Explorer Traced the Big Muir Glacier to Its Main Tributaries

Among the passengers on the Queen which returned from Alaska yesterday was Prof. John Muir of Martinez, Cal., the widely known authority on glaciers and in honor of whom the magnificent Muir glacier is named. Eleven years ago Prof. Muir, guided by an Indian, made his way into Glacier Bay, whose broad expanse had lain unrevealed through all the years since Vancouver cruised along the coast nearly a century before and charted every other inlet of importance but that; a chart that showed a straight line across the mouth of Glacier Bay that had not been broken through until Prof. Muir ventured in. Now Glacier Bay has become one of the most famous resorts for visitors that the world possesses. Professor Muir gave his observations, made with no more elaborate instruments than a three inch compass, to the government and this survey is the only one that has been made. Prof. Reid of the Case school of applied sciences is now up there making a full and accurate survey of the broad inlet from the depths of which rises the wall of the Muir glacier.

In his trip just ended Professor Muir, for the first time, went back over the glacier that bears his name, to its main tributaries. His trip has lasted about two months. His camp was established just in front of the glacier and he went on foot and by sled, accompanied only by an Indian, back on the glacier, covering thirty or forty miles in his journey. Henry Loomis, a Seattle attorney, was in camp with Prof. Muir, but did not accompany him on his explorations. Prof. Muir found that the glacier has seven immense broad-mouthed main tributaries all coming into the main basin from the mountains about. A great part of Prof. Muir's life had been spent in the impressive loneliness of the magnificent glacier scenery, but he told a GLOBE reporter last evening that he never experienced so overwhelming a sense of its splendor as he did on this last trip. Over the broad river of glistening undulating ice he traveled for days, crossing yawning crevasses, sledging on the frozen river, living from his bag of hard tack and dried stuff, with coffee if he could find petrified wood enough to boil it; in the midst of fields and valleys and mountains of ice and snow, unrelieved save by an occasional rock that broke out of the frozen sea. The weather was propitious. For eight days the sun shone as brightly as it was shining in Southern California. He suffered a little from snow blindness. The immense ice scenery was occasionally broken by running streams, little brooks and rivers that rushed like mad over bottoms of glistening blue ice through frictionless channels of ice, noiseless and as smooth surfaced as glass, beautiful with innumerable shades of the blue of the ice of their beds.

Prof. Muir made some careful observations, wrote lots of notes and has a little book full of pencil sketches showing where the main tributaries enter and what the scenery about looks like. He took measurements of the mouths of these big tributaries. The seven main tributaries of the great Muir glacier are fed each by fifteen or twenty smaller glacial tributaries from the mountains around about. Prof. Muir says that there is ice enough in the Muir glacier to make the whole 1,100 glaciers that Switzerland possesses.

EXTENSIVE MUIR CHRONOLOGY PLANNED FOR MICROFORM GUIDE

To assist Muir specialists using his collected writings, a detailed chronology of his life will be included in the hardcopy Guide to the John Muir Papers, to be published by Chadwyck-Healey, Inc. later this year. Some dates still need confirmation. We'd appreciate help from anyone who can pinpoint Muir's whereabouts and activities on the following dates: January-July 1885; February 1886-Spring 1888; Summer 1891-Spring 1892; January-May 1896; Fall 1896-Spring 1897; Winter 1898-Spring 1899; Fall 1899-Spring 1900; Fall 1901; Fall 1902-Spring 1903; Summer-Fall 1904; Fall 1906-Spring 1907; Summer-Fall 1907; November-December 1909.

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